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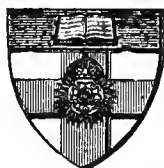
THE RELATIONS OF PHILOSOPHY
AND POETRY

THE RELATIONS OF PHILOSOPHY AND POETRY IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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BEING THE
JOHN OLIVER HOBBS MEMORIAL ESSAY

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In Memoriam

P. P. H.

THE RELATIONS OF PHILOSOPHY AND POETRY

IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

WHEN on one occasion towards the end of his life Tennyson begged Jowett not to consult with him or argue with him, as was his wont, on points of philosophy or religious doubt, "The Master of Balliol answered him in a remarkable utterance: 'Your poetry has *an element of philosophy more to be considered than any regular philosophy in England.* It is almost too much impregnated with philosophy, yet this to some minds will be its greatest charm. I believe that your 'In Memoriam' and your 'Crossing the Bar' will live for ever in men's hearts.'" Most readers and admirers of Tennyson will, we think, agree with Jowett, and will agree also that the utterance is remarkable, not only for its insight, but perhaps even more for the justness of its phrasing. Tennyson, like all great poets, realized that, whatever the true relation between the two may be, a reasoned and detailed system of philosophy, as such, is out of place in poetry; there it has no value till, "passing through the unity of

the poet's being, it reappears as a quality of the imagination."

For though philosophy and poetry are, as Wordsworth says, "twin labourers and heirs of the same hopes," they work in different ways, and appeal to different faculties of the human mind. Philosophy strives after universal and abstract truth, it works back from effect to cause, from observed facts, taken separately or in groups, to first principles; it aims at a systematic explanation of the facts of life and of the world in which we live; it is purely intellectual and appeals to the reason. Poetry, on the other hand, is emotional; it does not appeal directly to the intellect, but reaches the intellect through the senses, it "transmutes ideas into images." "Philosophy seeks to discover the universal in the particular; its end is to know and to possess the truth, and in that possession it reposes. The aim of poetry is to represent the universal through the particular, to give a concrete and living embodiment of a universal truth. The universal of poetry is not an abstract idea; it is particularized to sense, it comes before the mind clothed in the form of the concrete, presented under the appearance of a living organism whose parts are in vital and structural relation to the whole." Thus poetry, inferior to philosophy in one respect, transcends it in another. It is limited by this necessity of expressing the abstract in the concrete, of presenting the universal "not as it is in itself, but as seen through the medium of sensu-

ous imagery ”; yet, by its concentrative imagination, by its form, it seems to add something to the truth it expresses, to get beyond it, as it were, and at the same time to make it easier of apprehension. And this is true, not of poetry only, but of all art.

Further, as Pater points out, the imaginative contribution made by poetry to any truth is distinct from that made by the other arts. “ It is the mistake of much popular criticism to regard poetry, music, and painting—all the various products of art—as but translations into different languages of one and the same fixed quantity of imaginative thought, supplemented by certain technical qualities of colour, in painting—of sound, in music—of rhythmical words, in poetry. In this way, the sensuous element in art, and with it almost everything in art that is essentially artistic, is made a matter of indifference; and a clear apprehension of the opposite principle—that the sensuous material of each art brings with it a special phase or quality of beauty, untranslatable into the forms of any other, an order of impressions distinct in kind—is the beginning of all true aesthetic criticism. For, as art addresses not pure sense, still less the pure intellect, but the ‘ imaginative reason ’ through the senses, there are differences of kind in aesthetic beauty, corresponding to the differences in kind of the gifts of sense themselves. Each art, therefore, having its own peculiar and incommunicable sensuous charm, has its own special mode of reaching the

imagination, its own special responsibilities to its material."

In emphasizing the value and importance of the sensuous element in art Pater does not depreciate the intellectual element, and indeed it is on this latter that he bases his distinction between "good art" and "great art." The meanest, most unworthy subject, if it be properly treated, and thoroughly infused with the poetic spirit, may be good art, but it can never be great; for that the subject must be worthy of the treatment, and in this sense "subject" includes not only the abstract idea on which the poem is founded, but also, and more especially, the poet's conception of that idea. Thus the abstract idea in Tennyson's "Flower" is exactly the same as that in Browning's "Popularity," though Tennyson carries the argument a stage further; yet the two poems are quite distinct in conception and treatment. So also Browning's thought that "ends accomplished turn to means" is at the back of Tennyson's "Wages"—

"Give her the wages of going on, and not to die";

and it reappears in a different form again in one of Mr. Gould's "Lyrics"—

"Whose heart beneath the burden
Of longing never tires
Has new desire for guerdon
Of all his old desires;
For him the night of striving
Brings forth the strife of day;
His feet are unarriving
Upon the eternal way."

Again, in saying that "all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music," Pater does not imply that the best and highest poetry is "merely musical," but rather that in it, as in music, the distinction between matter and form is reduced to a minimum, so that the matter, the mere intellectual element in the poem, loses its virtue if it is considered apart from the form, as in a paraphrase or a translation. In a poetical translation the matter may again be penetrated by the poetic spirit, yet even then the emotional effect, though it may equal or even surpass that of the original, will never be the same. For Pater, poetry is essentially—

". . . high and passionate thoughts
To *their own* music chanted,"

and it is because the music is *their own* that it cannot be separated from them or altered.

It is the fault of most of the lesser schools of poetry that they tend to emphasize one of these two elements, matter and form, at the expense of the other. Thus while Tennyson's failures, at least in his early poems, are due to an excessive attention to mere form, Browning more frequently errs the other way; he pours forth his intellect in such profusion and with such rapidity that he has no time to infuse it sufficiently with the poetic spirit. It is rather different with the followers of Pope in the latter half of the eighteenth century. They first attended exclusively to the form, narrowing it and bringing it to their idea of

perfection, then clothed all their thoughts in this one dress. As the form was fixed, they did not try to think poetically so that their ideas might sing themselves. Thus the matter remains prosaic, and makes no emotional appeal; as Matthew Arnold says of the uninspired passages in Wordsworth, "the lines carry us really not a step farther than the proposition which they would interpret." This versified prose was attacked by the poets of the Romantic Revival; Shelley especially is emphatic in his declaration that "nothing can be equally well expressed in prose that is not tedious and supererogatory in verse." Then minor poets, and Tennyson and Swinburne in their lesser works, go to the other extreme, and seek for harmonious and musical effects without any corresponding beauty or depth of thought.

It is about this time that one hears so much of the cry of "Art for Art's sake," used by the critics as implying that "Art is the supreme end of human life." This interpretation gave rise to the doctrine that all serious thought was out of place in poetry and in art. It was against these critics, who complained of the moral significance of the later "Idylls of the King," that Tennyson directed the epigram quoted by his son—

"Art for Art's sake ! Hail truest Lord of Hell !
Hail Genius, Master of the Moral Will !
The filthiest of all paintings painted well
Is mightier than the purest painted ill !'
Yes, mightier than the purest painted well,
So prone are we toward the broad way to Hell."

Yet, though Tennyson is undoubtedly right in his condemnation, the poetical imagination can treat successfully subjects of which a "dry exhibition" would be impossible. This has been done, for example, by Shelley in "The Cenci," where he "increases the ideal, and diminishes the actual horror of the events; so that the pleasure which arises from the poetry which exists in these tempestuous sufferings and crimes may mitigate the pain of the contemplation of the moral deformity from which they spring." And there is this further argument in favour of the critics, that the Idylls undoubtedly fail, where they do fail, chiefly through their conscious and almost didactic moral purpose.

The later aesthetic movement of 1880, satirized by Gilbert in "Patience," has not this toleration of filthy matter, but rather such an exaggerated desire for purity, such a hatred of anything that is "calculated to bring the blush of shame to the cheek of modesty," that there is often no meaning left, and when the Duke objects that Bunthorne's poem is nonsense, the rapturous maidens are quite willing to admit the charge: "Nonsense, yes, perhaps," replies Saphir, "but oh, what precious nonsense!"

We have seen that the doctrine "Art for Art's sake" is most zealously opposed by Tennyson, whose lesser work tends to become merely musical. Similarly the view that the value of art depends on the matter alone is refuted by Browning, who

nevertheless fails most often through too much attention to matter.

“ ’Tis you speak, that’s your error. Song’s our art :
Whereas you please to speak these naked thoughts
Instead of draping them in sights and sounds.
—True thoughts, good thoughts, thoughts fit to treasure up !
But why such long prolusion and display,
Such turning and adjustment of the harp,
And taking it upon your breast, at length,
Duly to speak dry words across its strings ?
Stark-naked thought is in request enough :
Speak prose and hollo it till Europe hears !
. . . Grown men want thought, you think ;
Thought’s what they mean by verse, and seek in verse,
Boys seek for images and melody,
Men must have reason—so, you aim at men.
Quite otherwise ! ”

Then, from the instance of the mystic Boehme, who in seeking to explain the meaning of the flowers obscured and hid the flowers themselves, Browning draws the right conclusion—

“ But by the time youth slips a stage or two
While reading prose in that tough book he wrote . . .
We shut the clasps and find life’s summer past.
Then, who helps more, pray, to repair our loss—
Another Boehme with a tougher book
And subtler meanings of what roses say,—
Or some stout mage like him of Halberstadt,
John, who made things Boehme wrote thoughts about ?
He with a “look you !” vents a brace of rhymes,
And in there breaks the sudden rose herself,
Over us, under, round us every side,
Nay, in and out the tables and the chairs
And musty volumes, Boehme’s book and all,—
Buries us with a glory, young once more,
Pouring heaven into this shut house of life.”

Tennyson has embodied in one of his Idylls G. F. Watts’s ideal of a true portrait painter—

“As when a painter, poring on face
Divinely, thro’ all hindrance, finds the man
Behind it, and so paints him that his face,
The shape and colour of a mind and life,
Lives for his children, ever at its best,”

and the lines might very well be modified to apply to a poet as well. For it is exactly in this way that the poet broods over his object so as to bring out its inner meaning—to perceive it, first of all, and feel it for himself, then to reproduce the object so that this inner meaning is perceptible to all; thus he reveals the general and universal truth of which this is for him the concrete example. The poet does not, at least not in the highest poetry, state this in so many words; his business is not to explain the connection, but to make it self-evident, so that it needs no explanation. The climax of Wordsworth’s “Resolution and Independence,” its supreme value, lies not in the reflection in the last verse—

“I could have laughed myself to scorn to find
In that decrepit man so firm a mind”;

but rather in the description of the Leech Gatherer and in his “stately speech,” which, like all truly dramatic utterances, gains much of its force from its absolute simplicity, which comes to a climax in the last line—

“Yet still I persevere, and find them where I may.”

This is what Wordsworth means by “truth carried alive into the heart by passion,” and truth so carried cannot be supported by argument or

reasoning ; it is above reason and, like the painter's rendering of the mind and life in the face, it must carry conviction with it or it fails.

Coleridge says of Shakespeare that he "first studied patiently, meditated deeply, understood minutely, till knowledge, become habitual and intuitive, wedded itself to his habitual feelings, and at length gave birth to that stupendous power by which he stands alone, with no equal or second in his own class." This account agrees with Wordsworth's phrase "thoughtfulness matured to inspiration," and with his longer description of the genesis of poetry near the beginning of the Preface to the "Lyrical Ballads"; and indeed all definitions imply that "the poet has not only emotion and utterance, but insight; he is in some way a revealer of the deepest truths." Poetry is "the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge," "the perpetual endeavour to express the spirit of things," and it is in this aspect that its connection with philosophy lies.

Yet neither Wordsworth nor Coleridge nor the other critics quoted above would admit that poetry is a mere "gilding of the philosophic pill." Such indeed was the early Greek conception. "Poetry is the preparatory school of philosophy," says Plutarch; and again, "it opens and awakens the youthful mind to the doctrines of Philosophy." It is looked upon as a kind of twilight in which the mind must dwell before it can bear the full sunshine of philosophy. Yet though Plato, judging from the poetry he knew, banished all but the

didactic from his Republic, he realizes the connection which there is between an ideal poetry and philosophy; he sees that, as Butcher says, "The artist who is no mere imitator, whose work is a revelation to sense of eternal ideas, being possessed by an imaginative enthusiasm which is akin to the speculative enthusiasm of the philosopher, from the things of sense ascends to that higher region where truth and beauty are one." Again, Aristotle does not deny that poetry may teach, yet to him that is only a secondary and accidental function. And here Aristotle seems to go rather to the other extreme, that of the critic whose watchword is "Art for Art's sake." But this impression is corrected by other passages which show that he condemns only the consciously didactic moral purpose. The object of poetry is, he says, to produce emotional delight, a pure and elevated pleasure, but this pleasure depends on the power of poetry to express the universal in the particular, the ideal in the real. For him, as for the Greeks generally, and for all poets, "the world of reality and the world of imagination were not separate spheres which stood apart; the breath of poetry kindled the facts of experience and the traditions of the past. The ideal in Greek art was not the opposite of the real, but rather its fulfilment and perfection. Each sprang out of the same soil; the one was the full-blown flower of which the other was the germ." Hence the presentment of the ideal, the revelation of the heights to which the real might ascend, was

a source of emotional delight, and was pure and elevated in that it tended to uplift the soul.

Such pleasure could not proceed from a dogmatic presentation, in prose or in verse, of an abstract moral truth. The poet relates or describes, and allows the reader to deduce the moral for himself, he does not force it upon him. Frequently he is not conscious himself of what he is teaching—Goethe was indignant at being asked what idea he meant to embody in his “Faust.” “As if I knew myself and could inform them. From heaven, through the world, to hell, would indeed be something; but this is no idea, only a course of action. . . . It was, in short, not in my line, as a poet, to strive to embody anything abstract. I received in my mind impressions and those of a sensuous, animated, charming, varied, hundredfold kind, just as a lively imagination presented them; and I had, as a poet, nothing more to do than artistically to round them off and elaborate such views and impressions, and by means of a lively representation so to bring them forward that others might receive the same impression in hearing or reading my representation of them.” Similarly Wordsworth modifies his statement that each of his poems in the “Lyrical Ballads” has a worthy *purpose*: “Not that I always began to write with a distinct purpose formally conceived; but habits of meditation have, I trust, so prompted and regulated my feelings, that my description of such objects as strongly excite those feelings will be found to

carry along with them a *purpose*. If this opinion be erroneous, I can have little right to the name of a Poet." Shelley, on the contrary, knows the lesson which "The Cenci" ought to teach, but knows also that to give it dogmatically would spoil the tragedy. "There must also be nothing attempted to make the exhibition subservient to what is vulgarly termed a moral purpose," he writes in the Preface. "The highest moral purpose aimed at in the highest species of the drama is the teaching of the human heart, through its sympathies and antipathies, the knowledge of itself; in proportion to the possession of which knowledge every human being is wise, just, sincere, tolerant and kind. If dogmas can do more, it is well; but a drama is no fit place for the enforcement of them." Shelley has been criticised for representing Beatrice Cenci as a perfect character, and justifying her murder of her father. This is exactly what he does not do; in the play he represents Beatrice as she was, or as he conceives her to have been; he shows what she did and thought, and goes no further; he makes no attempt to judge her. But he knows that her conduct is wrong, that, to quote his own words, "the fit return to make to the most enormous injuries is kindness and forbearance, and a resolution to convert the injurer from his dark passions by peace and love," and outside the tragedy, when he is free to speak in his own person, he judges her accordingly.

Shelley does not claim that the dramatic

presentment of the character of Beatrice is more effective in teaching the human heart than any dogma could be, but he probably felt that that was the case. As a rule, reasoning leaves men cold; a little experience is of more value than any amount of argument; and poetry, which makes us enter into the feelings and sufferings of others as if they were our own, appeals to the emotions much as experience does, and has the same result. "Vital truths are not to be realized by logical reasoning, but by the exercise of the sympathies." In poetry "we read the meaning of life and discover its real issues," but they are not pointed out to us in any abstract way, we have to discover them for ourselves.

"No man," says Coleridge, "was ever yet a great poet without being at the same time a profound philosopher," and his words are echoed by Sir Henry Taylor. It is undoubtedly true that in poets such as Homer, Dante and Shakespeare there is an "element of philosophy," an "interpretation of life" not, indeed, developed systematically, but underlying and colouring all the poet's work, giving it that "high seriousness" which Arnold, following Aristotle, takes as one of the prime requisites and tests of the highest poetry.

In saying that this philosophy is not developed in any abstract way, one must remember that it is possible for a poet so to heighten the emotional effect by the mere force and energy of his expression that the matter seems to lose its abstract

qualities; "the wheels take fire from the mere rapidity of their motion." This is the case in the successful passages of such poems as Pope's "Essay on Man," and it is the lack of this poetic heightening that causes the failure of so much of Wordsworth's "Excursion," as, for example, in the following lines—

"The vast Frame
Of social nature changes evermore
Her organs and her members, with decay
Restless, and restless generation, powers
And functions dying and produced at need,—
And by this law the mighty whole subsists :
With an ascent and progress in the main ;
Yet, oh ! how disproportioned to the hopes
And expectations of self-flattering minds !"

Yet Wordsworth does not always fail in this way; and when he does succeed he is almost unequalled. Perhaps the highest level is reached in this passage from "Tintern Abbey," one line of which Tennyson thought "almost the grandest in the English language"—

"And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts ; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man ;
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things."

This, though it is an abstract idea and not presented to the mind as a concrete image, cannot be supported by logical reasoning; it is, again,

“truth carried alive into the heart by passion,” and by no other means can entrance be gained for it—it must be accepted or rejected on its own merits.

Rarely, however, does poetry attain to such a high level by this means; more usually the idea has to be “transmuted into an image.” The poet, who has first to abstract the universal from the particular, has afterwards to reclothe it in the particular so that it may “steal access through our senses to our minds.” Sometimes this is done by a dramatic presentation, as in many of Tennyson’s and Browning’s poems. And this is not the method of the drama proper, though it finds a place there, as in the person of Hamlet, where the philosophical ideas are shown, not in themselves, but as a part of Hamlet’s mind and character, revealed in his thoughts and actions. The idea is transmuted into the image of the mind possessed by it, and the one cannot be separated from the other. Thus one thinks of Bishop Blougram or Ulysses, rather than of the abstract philosophy which characterizes them. And so although, as in the case of Bishop Blougram, this philosophy is often expounded systematically and supported by logical reasoning, it is no longer abstract; it is coloured and rendered more vivid by Blougram’s personality, and by the general character of his mind; moreover, it is not brought forward as an abstract question, but in explanation and justification of his life and actions. The method is the same in “A Grammarian’s Funeral,”

though it is the Grammarian's friends and followers who are speaking—

“ Yea, this in him was the peculiar grace
(Hearten our chorus !)
That before living he'd learn how to live—
No end to learning :
Earn the means first—God surely will contrive
Use for our earning.
Others mistrust and say, ‘ But time escapes :
Live now or never ! ’
He said, ‘ What's time ? Leave Now for dogs and
apes !
Man has Forever.’ . . .
Lofty designs must close in like effects :
Loftily lying,
Leave him—still loftier than the world suspects,
Living and dying.”

This conclusion, and the conception which typifies the mind of the Grammarian in his lofty resting-place, will serve to introduce the last and most important method of dealing with philosophy—the imaginative method which transmutes the idea into some concrete image from nature or life; and it is here, where the transmutation is most complete, where there is little if any of the abstract idea left untransformed, that poetry is most often successful. Indeed, it might be argued that the lines from “Tintern Abbey” quoted above owe much of their effect to the fact that the idea is one which is in itself pictorial. The following lines from the fourth book of “The Excursion” curiously illustrate both Wordsworth's failure in treating an idea in the abstract form and his success when he transforms it to an image.

“ Within the soul a faculty abides,
That with interpositions, which would hide
And darken, so can deal that they become
Contingencies of pomp; and serve to exalt
Her native brightness. As the ample moon,
In the deep stillness of a summer even
Rising behind a thick and lofty grove,
Burns, like an unconsuming fire of light,
In the green trees; and, kindling on all sides
Their leafy umbrage, turns the dusky vale
Into a substance glorious as her own,
Yea, with her own incorporated, by power
Capacious and serene.”

Here the picture of the moon shining through the trees provides the key to the whole passage, and gives it its poetical value. Sometimes, as in the simile of the cabin passengers in “ Bishop Blougram,” such an image is carried through all the stages of the argument, and serves to heighten its emotional effect, causing it to appeal to the imaginative reason through the senses. More often, a line or two only will suffice—

“ With me, Faith means perpetual unbelief
Kept quiet like the snake 'neath Michael's foot
Who stands calm just because he feels it writhe.”

Short poems are frequently conceived entirely in this imaginative way. And in these more often than not the comparison is not definitely expressed, as it is in most of the examples quoted above, but the image is introduced in such a way that no one can fail to perceive its inner meaning. Perhaps the supreme example is “ Crossing the Bar,” which Jowett quoted as a proof of the value of the “ element of philosophy ” in Tennyson's poetry.

“Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me !
And may there be no moaning of the bar,
When I put out to sea,

But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
Too full for sound and foam,
When that which drew from out the boundless deep
Turns again home.

Twilight and evening bell,
And after that the dark !
And may there be no sadness of farewell,
When I embark ;

For tho’ from out our bourne of Time and Place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crost the bar.”

This seems to have been the favourite method of Arthur Hugh Clough—most of his best poems are written by this receipt. In many, “*Qua Cursum Ventus*,” and “*Where lies the Land ?*” for example, the one image is carried right through, as in “*Crossing the Bar*,” and it might be thought that this was necessary to the unity of the poem. But that multiplicity of images does not inevitably destroy unity of effect is amply proved by the lyric “*Say not the struggle nought availeth*,” possibly the most perfect of all Clough’s works. No apology is needed for once more quoting in full—

“Say not, the struggle nought availeth,
The labour and the wounds are vain,
The enemy faints not, nor faileth,
And as things have been they remain.

If hopes were dupes, fears may be liars ;
It may be, in yon smoke concealed,
Your comrades chase e’en now the fliers,
And, but for you, possess the field.

For while the tired waves, vainly breaking,
Seem here no painful inch to gain,
Far back, through creeks and inlets making,
Comes silent, flooding in, the main.

And not by eastern windows only,
When daylight comes, comes in the light,
In front, the sun climbs slow, how slowly,
But westward, look, the land is bright."

Each of the last two verses introduces a distinct metaphor, yet each contributes to the main argument, and gives a different aspect of it. The inner meaning is the same in each case, yet is carried a stage further; and because the images are imaginative and not fanciful, because the connection between the idea and the image is not external only, the stanzas are linked together, and the poem has a unity of effect quite as great as if the same metaphor were continued throughout. The same unity in multiplicity is gained by Mrs. Browning in the middle of a longer poem—

"There are nettles everywhere,
But smooth green grasses are more common still;
The blue of heaven is larger than the cloud."

Of course, as with all literary distinctions, there is no definite boundary line, and these methods may be varied and combined in an infinite number of ways; "Bishop Blougram's Apology" will furnish examples of nearly every kind. So, too, in "Rabbi ben Ezra"; the conception is mainly dramatic, yet we know little of Rabbi ben Ezra, as Browning conceived him, beyond his philosophy—there are none of those little side touches which

fill out the portrait of Bishop Blougram or of Andrea del Sarto. And so the poem is rather pure philosophy, heightened and intensified by the imaginative expression and by the numerous images, especially by the metaphor of the Potter's wheel, which, as so often in Browning, seems to sum up the teaching of the whole poem.

“ What though the earlier grooves
Which ran the laughing loves
Around thy base, no longer pause and press ?
What though, about thy rim,
Skull-things in order grim
Grow out, in gravest mood, obey the sterner stress ?
Look not thou down but up !
To uses of a cup,
The festal board, lamp's flash and trumpet's peal,
The new wine's foaming flow,
The Master's lips aglow !
Thou, heaven's consummate cup, what needst thou
with earth's wheel ? ”

This method, where the dramatic conception is supported and rendered more imaginative and poetical by the pictorial presentation, is also found in many of Browning's shorter lyrics. “ Life in a Love ” will furnish a good example—

“ Though I do my best I shall scarce succeed.
But what if I fail of my purpose here ?
It is but to keep the nerves at strain,
To dry one's eyes and laugh at a fall,
And, baffled, get up and begin again,—
So the chace takes up one's life, that's all.”

Matthew Arnold prefers a more directly pictorial imagery to this dramatic kind. His method is generally the same as that of his friend Clough, but he sometimes varies it, giving a rather larger

admixture of abstract philosophy. Thus in pieces like "Dover Beach" and "A Summer Night," Arnold first describes the scene in his mind, then interprets it, or rather gives expression by means of the same imagery to the thoughts to which the scene gives rise. So that not only does this imagery heighten and intensify the latter part of the poem, but also the truth and vividness of the description bring the reader into a state of mind approaching that in which Arnold conceived the poem, and enable him more readily to understand and sympathize with what follows.

It is to be noted, moreover, that even where Arnold's ideas are least concrete, they are rarely if ever worked out logically; they are made to appeal to the imaginative reason, not to the pure intellect. He feels that certain ideas, mere fancies even, are beautiful and lofty in conception, worthy of poetical expression; this he gives them, but he goes no further, he makes no attempt to set forth a reasoned explanation of things; his interpretation of life and the universe is not formulated dogmatically. It is because this is true also of Tennyson's "In Memoriam" that Dr. Jowett is right in classing it among the immortal poems of the world. Not, of course, that this quality alone is sufficient, but in this particular poem it is essential, as Tennyson himself realizes—

"If these brief lays, of Sorrow born,
Were taken to be such as closed
Grave doubts and answers here proposed,
Then these were such as men might scorn:

Her care is not to part and prove ;
She takes, when harsher moods remit,
What slender shade of doubt may flit,
And makes it vassal unto love."

These verses in themselves prove only that Tennyson's intention was right; they might even be taken to imply that Tennyson was doubtful of his success. Yet in reading the poem one feels that the explanation is unnecessary. The thoughts and fancies seem to come, one after the other, just as they occurred to his mind—they are, in this sense at least, "wild and wandering cries;" there is no attempt to formulate any regular philosophy. And because he wrote not to prove anything definite, but to ease his own heart of its heavy burden, he has succeeded in easing the hearts of others.

It is for the most part with this same object, the transmutation of ideas into images, that modern poets have taken up mythological, legendary or historical subjects. The old mythologies were dead, but men felt that there was much beauty in them and that this beauty could not "pass into nothingness." They therefore sought some means of preserving it and bringing out its lasting value. The same need for some interpretation of Greek myths had been felt, as Pater points out, in the fifteenth century. At that time the only solution that could be found lay in allegory; but at the beginning of the nineteenth century these allegories seemed unsatisfying, they no longer appealed to men. Therefore a new

solution had to be found, a new meaning discovered. This time the solution was more directly philosophical. The old myths were gropings after truth, attempts to explain the phenomena of the world of nature and of man; they were not falsehood but imperfect truth, and could therefore be made to harmonize with and to express some aspect of a fuller and more perfect truth. Thus Tennyson treats the story of Ulysses much as Browning treats that of the Grammarian; he takes it as the type, the supreme example, of the belief that there is "no end to learning," and of the consequent desire to—

"Follow knowledge like a sinking star,
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought."

The incompleteness of this idea, the side on which it fails, is shown in Paracelsus, who "attains" in realizing that knowledge, and the power resulting from knowledge, are worthless without love. Prometheus—in whom Shelley sees "the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature, impelled by the purest and truest motives to the best and noblest ends"—gives another aspect of this same union of love and power, infinite love for mankind and infinite power of enduring suffering and wrong.

So, too, in "Hyperion," Keats identifies the triumph of his idea of Beauty, the fulfilment of the law that "first in Beauty must be first in Might," with the victory of the Olympians over the Titans. It is curious that Keats and Shelley,

however much they differ in other respects, agree in their ideas of the principle of Beauty, in the belief that "Beauty is truth," or rather that nothing which is not true and noble can be beautiful. The idea is not, of course, worked out in the same way by the two poets. Shelley's view is brought out very clearly in his "Defence of Poetry." For him, everything which is true and right, in fact or fiction, history or art, is a direct manifestation of the Ideal of Beauty which in his poetry he personifies under various names. In Keats there is not this mythological treatment, but there is the same identification of Truth and Beauty, and the same connection of both with Joy and Happiness, and in him it inspires poetry such as the "Hyperion" fragment and the "Ode on a Grecian Urn."

There is, of course, much poetry in which there is no direct attempt to express philosophical ideas even by means of imagery; yet philosophy is necessary for its conception. Some view of life, some ideas about mankind, form an essential part of a poet's imagination, and their influence can be traced even when they are not definitely expressed. Thus Byron's pessimism is proved nearly as much by "The Vision of Judgment" and "The Dream" as by "Childe Harold," though neither could be termed a philosophical poem. So also, to take another example, Arnold's sonnet on Shakespeare could not have been written without his sense of the rush and tumult of the world at large and his exaltation of calm

and quiet strength. It is not, however, essential that these ideas should be the fixed belief of the poet, though he must identify himself with them completely for the time being, or the poem in which he uses them can hardly be successful. This power of seeing things from opposite points of view is especially characteristic of Browning. Mr. Walker, in his statement that Arnold keeps closer to the "pure white star of truth" than Browning, seems to imply that this faculty shows a lack of regard for truth; it proves rather that Browning realizes his fallibility and desires to present things not only partially but from every possible standpoint. In striking contrast to this is Byron's complete inability to get away from his own personal conception, which is one cause of the monotonous sameness of his poetry. It may be added that one's agreement with the philosophy contained in any poem may affect one's personal liking for it, but can hardly make any difference to its true poetical value.

In narrative poetry and in the drama any philosophy which may be introduced directly is, except in such cases as that of Hamlet, quite apart from the main purpose of the poem and, unless managed very carefully, is likely to prove distracting and spoil the effect. Yet the philosophy is there, or at least a knowledge of mankind which may take its place. It lies behind the poem; it is a part of the poet's "shaping faculty of imagination," and enables him to see things more clearly and to reject what is unnecessary.

The truth of this philosophy gives the poetry truth of substance; its "high and excellent seriousness" gives to our spirits, as Arnold points out, what they can rest upon, and thus raises the poetry to the highest level. Comic and satiric poetry may have all other essentials, but it can hardly have this "high seriousness" to any great degree. Hence it can never rank among the very greatest poetry; it is concerned with the weaknesses of mankind, not with their virtues; it may teach us, but has little or no power to uplift us; it may add to our forces, but cannot give us strength and courage to make a better use of those already at our disposal.

Purely descriptive poetry is another kind which would seem to have little of this ennobling quality. Yet it must be remembered that a beautiful or majestic landscape has in itself a certain power over the mind of man, even though that power is not as great as Wordsworth would have us believe. If therefore the description be true and just, it should have the same effect as the original scene, all the more as the poet is generally more susceptible to such influences than ordinary people, and brings out in his description the features which contribute to this general effect. Most often, indeed, the description is written with the special purpose of "dipping into the abysm" and finding what lies "behind the green and blue" of earth and sky and sea; there is the desire to interpret nature for man, or better still to enable man to interpret her for

himself. This motive is strongest at the beginning of the century, when there is the common belief in the presence in nature of an "indwelling intelligence" akin to the mind in man, when Coleridge finds—

"That outward forms, the loftiest, still receive
Their finer influence from the world within;
Fair ciphers of vague import, where the eye
Traces no spot, in which the heart may read
History and prophecy."

This belief, as Pater points out, is one of the chief points of resemblance between Coleridge and the Lake School, and leads not to indifference but to a minute realism, a close attention to details of form and colour, found not only in the poets, but also in the paintings of Turner and his school. One would think that Shelley was too much wrapped up in his own fancies to pay such attention to outward detail, yet even in him there are traces of the same tendency, as in the description of the "legioned rooks" in the "Lines written among the Euganean Hills"—

" . . . their plumes of purple grain,
Starred with drops of golden rain."

One finds the same sort of detail when he is describing imaginary scenes. Tennyson and Browning also have this realism, though in them it can scarcely be attributed to the same cause; there is still, however, the tendency to "rouse, to startle the human spirit into sharp and eager observation" which, in the opinion of Novalis and Pater, is one of the chief services of philosophy.

One may compare what Browning says of the art of painting in "Fra Lippo Lippi"—

"For, don't you mark? we're made so that we love
First when we see them painted, things we have passed
Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see;
And so they are better, painted—better to us,
Which is the same thing. Art was given for that;
God uses us to help each other so,
Lending our minds out."

There is another class of poetry well represented in the nineteenth century of which it is more difficult to speak, namely, the romantic—using the term romantic in its narrowest sense, as including only poems of the type of "The Ancient Mariner" and "The Lady of Shalott." Swinburne ranks "Christabel" with Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind," and above the "Ode to a Nightingale" and all other poems of the period. It is difficult to see his reasons for so doing, and it is doubtful whether any other critics could be found to agree with him. Apart from its incompleteness, it may be questioned whether romantic poetry can ever attain to the highest rank. Its remoteness from the world of reality is hardly lessened by passages like that on friendship in the second part of "Christabel," or by such a moral as is given at the end of "The Ancient Mariner." These things are not essential; it is not of them that we think when the poems come into our minds. Indeed, in some of the most perfect of romantic poetry, "The Lady of Shalott" and "La Belle Dame sans Merci" for example, there is no trace of any such connection. One

finds this same remoteness in Spenser's "Faery Queene," in spite of the political allegory running through it, and for this reason the poem must be ranked below the highest poetry. It is probably true that a certain amount of philosophy, of knowledge of the real world, is necessary for the imaginative construction of the other world of romance. Yet even so, this other world has little bearing on our own, and its poetry must be content to remain in a lower class.

So far we have considered only the general relations of philosophy and poetry, the ways in which philosophy is expressed in poetry and in which its influence is felt. There still remains something to be said about the nature of this poetical philosophy, and its relation to the thoughts and ideas of the world outside. Mr. Bradley has pointed out that the English mind expresses its deepest insight and feelings most fully in poetry; its greatest poetry appears when its spiritual temperature is highest, but its philosophy comes later, when the time of stress is over. He goes on to prove that this lack of force and fervour in English philosophy of the age of Wordsworth prevents it from corresponding to English poetry as contemporary German poetry and philosophy correspond. Though Shelley's philosophy is taken primarily from Godwin, it goes far beyond Godwin's, and but for this connection Godwin's would be almost forgotten. It is remarkable, moreover, that Coleridge, who of all Englishmen of that time had most genius for philosophical

speculation, showed least of it in the poetry for which he is famous.

The belief in the greatness of the mind of man which, as Mr. Bradley shows, is expressed philosophically in Germany and poetically in England, is also expressed politically in the French Revolution, and underlies most of the thought of the time. Wordsworth's firm conviction "that all which we behold is full of blessings," the enthusiastic belief in the future progress of man of which Shelley's melancholy is a sign, the pessimistic and cynical view of life which runs through all Byron's work, are all different expressions of this same belief. To this also may be traced the melancholy, the *mal de siècle* which characterizes the French Romantic school—a melancholy due to a belief in the greatness of man's capabilities and the worthlessness of his achievements.

After this period of stress, of great hopes and beliefs, comes a period of despair, which, as one would expect, is marked by an entire lack of great poetry, those who did write being content, as Sir Henry Taylor pointed out in the preface to "Philip van Artevelde," to follow Byron and copy his faults without having any of his redeeming genius. But after this short interregnum, the "gospel according to Jean Jacques" is succeeded by the "gospel of work," heralded by Tennyson as well as by its chief advocate Carlyle. Tennyson, indeed, throughout his life gave expression to, if he did not anticipate, the thought of his time; this is proved by the difference

between the ideas recorded in "Locksley Hall" and those in "Locksley Hall Sixty Years After." Browning, though he is more remote from the life of the time than Tennyson, yet becomes the poet of the Italian struggle for liberty, and the same is true of Mrs. Browning and of Swinburne. Similarly, the doubt of the time, the struggle to reconcile old and new beliefs, is seen in Arnold and his friend Clough. Yet this is only a secondary period, when the tide is on the ebb; it has not the greatness and enthusiasm of the age of Wordsworth. Therefore, as one would expect from what Mr. Bradley says, English philosophy rises once more, so that there is a correspondence between it and the poetry. Thus Spencer's philosophy gives us the theory of Evolution which we find also in different forms in Tennyson and in Darwin; there is further the belief that "behind the Knowable is dimly visible the Unknowable," which Tennyson has worked out in "The Ancient Sage," perhaps the most purely philosophical of all his poems, and one, it may be remarked, to which we turn less for its own sake than for the help it gives us in understanding Tennyson's mind.

Thus throughout the century there is a general correspondence between the thoughts and ideas in the world at large and those in the poetry; and, in England at any rate, it is in poetry that they receive their highest expression. Because of this, poetry seems to get rather what is essential and eternal in those ideas than what is merely

temporary; poets are, as Mrs. Browning has said—

“The only speakers of essential truth,
 Opposed to relative, comparative,
 And temporal truths: the only holders by
 His sun-skirts, through conventional gray of looms,
 The only teachers who instruct mankind
 From just a shadow on a charnel-wall
 To find man's veritable stature out
 Erect, sublime—the measure of a man.”

It is to them, therefore, that we look for spiritual vision and inspiration.

If the service of philosophy be indeed to rouse our senses into sharp and eager observation, to enable us to see in the world around us all that is to be seen in it by the finest senses, then, for us at least, poetry performs the same service. To quote Matthew Arnold: “The grand power of poetry is its interpretive power . . . the power of so dealing with things as to awaken in us a wonderfully full, new, and intimate sense of them, and of our relations with them.” Mr. Bradley declares that Oxford's best intellectual gift to him was “the conviction that what imagination loved as poetry, reason might love as philosophy, and that in the end these are two ways of saying the same thing.” With the concluding sentences of Mr. Bradley's note this essay may fittingly end—

“So far as any single function of spiritual life can be said to have an intrinsic value, poetry, it seems to me, possesses it just as other functions

do, and it is in each case irreplaceable. And further, it seems to me, poetry attains its own aim, and in doing so makes its contribution to the whole, most surely and fully when it seeks its own end without attempting to reach those of co-ordinate functions, such as the attainment of philosophic truth or the furtherance of moral progress. But then I believe this because I also believe that the unity of human nature in its diverse activities is so intimate and pervasive that no influence can affect any one of them alone, and that no one of them can operate or change without transmitting its influence to the rest. If I may use the language of paradox I would say that the pursuit of poetry for its own sake is the pursuit both of truth and of goodness. Devotion to it is devotion to 'the good cause of the world'; and wherever the imagination is satisfied, there, if we had a knowledge we have not, we should discover no idle fancy but the image of a truth."

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